



Why different interpretations of vulnerability matter in climate change discourses

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Abstract:

In this article, we discuss how two interpretations of vulnerability in the climate change literature are manifestations of different discourses and framings of the climate change problem. The two differing interpretations, conceptualized here as 'outcome vulnerability' and 'contextual vulnerability', are linked respectively to a scientific framing and a human-security framing. Each framing prioritizes the production of different types of knowledge, and emphasizes different types of policy responses to climate change. Nevertheless, studies are seldom explicit about the interpretation that they use. We present a diagnostic tool for distinguishing the two interpretations of vulnerability and use this tool to illustrate the practical consequences that interpretations of vulnerability have for climate change policy and responses in Mozambique. We argue that because the two interpretations are rooted in different discourses and differ fundamentally in their conceptualization of the character and causes of vulnerability, they cannot be integrated into one common framework. Instead, it should be recognized that the two interpretations represent complementary approaches to the climate change issue. We point out that the human-security framing of climate change has been far less visible in formal, international scientific and policy debates, and addressing this imbalance would broaden the scope of adaptation policies.

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Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience:

audience to whom the resource is directed

Researcher

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Extreme Weather Event, Food/Water Quality, Food/Water Security, Food/Water Security, Precipitation,

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

Solar Radiation, Temperature

Extreme Weather Event: Drought, Flooding, Landslides

Food/Water Quality: Other Water Quality Issue

Water Quality (other): Saltwater intrusion

Food/Water Security: Agricultural Productivity, Livestock Productivity, Nutritional Quality

Temperature: Fluctuations

Geographic Feature: 

resource focuses on specific type of geography

Ocean/Coastal

Geographic Location: 

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Africa

African Region/Country: African Country

Other African Country: Mozambique

Health Impact: 

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

General Health Impact

Mitigation/Adaptation: 

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Model/Methodology: 

type of model used or methodology development is a focus of resource

Exposure Change Prediction, Methodology

Resource Type: 

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article, Review

Resilience: 

capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

A focus of content

Timescale: 



time period studied

Long-Term (>50 years)

Vulnerability/Impact Assessment:

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content